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# Administration Denies Planting False Reports

By GERALD M. BOYD  
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WASHINGTON, Oct. 2 — The White House denied today that the Administration had planted false reports with news organizations in the United States as a means of bringing pressure on the Libyan leader, Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi.

But as the same time, Larry Speakes, the White House spokesman, said President Reagan had approved in mid-August a policy of unspecified "steps" to discourage the Libyan leader from conducting terrorist attacks against the United States.

Mr. Speakes's statements were prompted by a report in The Washington Post today. The spokesman said his denial that false reports had been planted as part of a program of "disinformation," was based on assurances from Adm. John M. Poindexter, Mr. Reagan's national security adviser.

Mr. Speakes had no comment on whether the Administration had tried to conduct such a disinformation campaign against Libya in foreign news organizations.

## Credibility Questioned

As a result of The Post's report, the credibility of both Mr. Speakes and Admiral Poindexter became the subject of spirited questioning today in long White House briefings marked by repeated challenges to previous public and private comments by them regarding Libya.

In an interview with columnists, Mr. Reagan indicated surprise at reports of a disinformation effort aimed at Libya. But he went on seemingly to confirm the existence of memos discussing steps to be taken against Libya. Administration officials had earlier confirmed that the President had personally approved a plan of action against Colonel Qaddafi.

Mr. Reagan said: "Well, I challenge the veracity of that entire story that I read this morning with great shock, and sometimes I understand your sacred policy of never revealing sources, but do you really have to defend sources that misinform you?"

Then, when pressed, Mr. Reagan said his Administration had tried to determine whether Mr. Qaddafi was "planning additional moves or terrorist acts."

"And so, yes, there are memos back and forth about that and what the information is, and so when I challenge the veracity of that whole story, I can't deny that here and there they're going to have something to hang it on."

Mr. Reagan also sought to put to rest speculation that pressure tactics against Mr. Qaddafi by the United States might provoke terrorist acts and lead to casualties.

"Our position has been one in which we'd just as soon have Mr. Qaddafi go to bed every night wondering what we might do," the President said. "And I think that is the best position for anyone like that to be in."

"Certainly," he continued, "we did not intend any program in which we were going to suggest or encourage him to do more things, more terrorism, conduct more terrorist attacks. We would hope that the one thing we have done would have turned him off on that."

The controversy over The Post's report raised new questions about whether some Administration officials had intentionally misstated facts on the status of Libyan terrorist activities in August. At that time the Administration confirmed a report in The Wall Street Journal saying there was a renewed threat of Libyan attacks.

Mr. Speakes and other officials adamantly denied today that such misrepresentations had occurred, while suggesting that news reports might have overstated the situation.

## 'Collision Course' Reported

In August, after The Wall Street Journal reported that the United States and Libya were on a "collision course," a senior White House official in Santa Barbara, Calif., where Mr. Reagan was vacationing, said the Administration had "reason to believe" that Colonel Qaddafi had "not forsaken" his desire to create terrorist activities.

The senior official said after the Aug. 25 article appeared that it was generally correct and later added that it was "authoritative, but not authorized." He said the United States had "hard evidence" to support its claims, which were based on intelligence reports of varying degrees of reliability. At the time, he declined to disclose the reports.

The Washington Post's account said a three-page memorandum, drafted by Admiral Poindexter and approved on Aug. 14, had recommended the use of "a disinformation program" that combined "real and illusionary" events. Another memo to the President before that meeting, however, said the Libyan leader "was temporarily quiescent" in his support of terrorism, although he could later move to a more active role, The Post reported.

Mr. Speakes said today that while he had not reviewed either document, the information provided to The Wall Street Journal "was not a part of any plan or memo drafted by Poindexter and approved by the President and the U.S. Government."

The spokesman, who answered questions on Libya for nearly three hours, defended the statements he made in August in Santa Barbara and later in Los Angeles. Some were challenged by State Department and White House officials here, whom Mr. Speakes described at the time as uninformed.

Today he said: "What I'm indicating to you, and what I indicated in Los Angeles, is that the information contained in The Wall Street Journal in these various intelligence reports was information from intelligence sources. That was hard, that was firm."

Later, focusing on some of the specifics of The Journal article, a senior White House official said that intelligence reports after the American bombing of Libya on April 14 had suggested a lull in terrorist activities by Colonel Qaddafi, but that they began to increase around mid-July. The official said he was unaware, however, whether the United States was planning new military activities against Libya, as The Journal's report suggested, although there were always contingency plans.

In addition, the official said The Journal had correctly reported that the United States had received information that the Libyan leader could be unstable, although he said that he had no way of assessing how serious the mental problems were.

Mr. Speakes's denial that false reports had been planted came in a terse statement that relied entirely on what he said he had been told by Admiral Poindexter.

"Poindexter says further that there was no attempt to provide information to the U.S. media," he said.

Mr. Reagan had approved steps to be taken against Libya at an Aug. 14 meeting of the National Security Council, the senior White House official said. He would not indicate, however, if such a disinformation campaign was among the measures approved.

"The President approved steps to be taken in U.S. policy toward Libya," the official said. "Well, basically they were designed to keep U.S. readiness at a peak as far as thwarting terrorist incidents and to discourage Qaddafi from conducting, continuing to conduct and plan, terrorist incidents."

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**Disinformation Is Denied**

Another senior White House official said at the meeting with columnists that a suggestion that the United States had engaged in a disinformation campaign "simply is not the case, and that is unequivocal."

Mr. Speakes said he was unaware if the White House had a policy that prohibits a disinformation campaign from being conducted abroad, although he said some individual Federal agencies, such as the United States Information Agency, had such a prohibition. An executive order signed by Mr. Reagan in 1981 prohibits the Central Intelligence Agency from engaging in covert action that could "influence U.S. political processes, public opinion, policies or media."

A spokesman for the the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence said today that the panel would examine whether there was a violation of the executive order.